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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9286
INFO RUCNSOM/SOMALIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000805

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/E AND ACTING A/S CARTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Targeted Killings of Prominent Leaders

REF: Nairobi 784

1. (SBU) Summary. The last month has marked a surge in assassinations and attacks targeting prominent members of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and leaders associated with the TFG in Mogadishu. By targeting prominent persons engaged in peace and reconciliation efforts and those trying to expand the TFG support base in Mogadishu, the killings have turned public sentiment against al-Shabaab. Sources in the capital confirm that kinsmen of the targeted persons are used to carry out the killings in order to minimize clan reprisals against al-Shabaab. The government and clan elders have identified al-Shabaab as being behind the attacks, though al-Shabaab leaders deny involvement. Al-Shabaab reportedly deployed a dozen well-trained hit men to eliminate a long list of prominent persons. Religious leaders, clan elders and TFG figures, especially those formerly allied with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), condemned al-Shabaab's continued violence and encouraged community-based security efforts to counter the attacks. Some believe these targeted attacks among former UIC allies will lead to violent confrontation between militias loyal to the TFG and those loyal to al-Shabaab and other anti-government groups. End summary.

Targeted Violence in Mogadishu,
Limiting Outreach

2. (SBU) The last month has marked a surge in attacks targeting prominent members of the government and leaders associated with the TFG in Mogadishu. Sources in the capital confirm that kinsmen of the targeted person are used to carry out the killings to minimize clan reprisals against al-Shabaab, who government and clan elders have identified as being behind the attacks. Al-Shabaab leaders deny involvement. Al-Shabaab reportedly deployed a dozen well-trained hit men to eliminate a long list of prominent persons who are helping the TFG gain momentum and peel off the al-Shabaab support base. Since the end of March, a series of violent attacks have rocked the confidence of officials in Mogadishu, many of whom now limit their movements solely between their homes and offices. Parliamentarians have told us they are "living in fear because everyone knows there is price on our heads." They acknowledged that their outreach efforts have been constrained by the threats.

3. (SBU) On April 22, President Sharif said all those killed were personally known to him. "They were courageous men who sacrificed for their country and they were working for peace," he said. President Sharif said killing these people will never take anyone to paradise. "If you want paradise, go to the mosques, pray, read the Quran and assist the people," he said. By showing restraint against

violent provocations, the government wanted Somalis to be clear who were the trouble makers, Sharif declared. The TFG President said the government will soon protect its people and appealed to Somalis to support the government against perpetrators of violence. (Comment: Sharif never specifically named al-Shabaab as the perpetrator of the violence, but most Somalis recognized his reference to the group.)

Assassinating Peace-builders

¶4. (SBU) On March 30, unidentified gunmen killed Abdirahman Mohamud Jimale "Shifti" (Hawiye/Abgaal) the spokesman of the 2007 National Reconciliation Conference. Gunmen initially exchanged fire with TFG militia guarding the Deputy Mayor of Mogadishu. The gunmen then stopped Shifti's car and opened fire, killing him immediately. Two of Shifti's guards were also killed, and another wounded. Shifti was a prominent Somali politician and as spokesman for the NRC, he was a close Embassy contact during the Mogadishu-based reconciliation conference. Before his death Shifti has been working closely with TFG Prime Minister Sharmarke on peace-building and reconciliation efforts. The Prime Minister told us he suspects Shifti was directly targeted for his peace efforts.

¶5. (SBU) On April 15, suspected members of an al-Shabaab hit squad killed Abdullahi Isse Abtidon (Hawiye/Duduble), a Member of Parliament who was also actively involved in outreach efforts. Abtidon was shot while standing outside the Mogadishu Coca Cola Company where he also served as an administrator. Abtidon was a prominent religious leader in Mogadishu and served as assistant to President Sharif while he was UIC chairman. The Prime Minister

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told us Abtidon has been working with him as an interlocutor, using his influence with former Islamic Court officials to reach out to hard-line Islamists opposed to the TFG. Our contacts told us that Duduble clan members and close relatives in al-Shabaab conspired to kill him, in order to prevent clan reprisals. In a recent meeting with the Ambassador (reftel), Sharmarke lamented that Abtidon was the second person to be killed in his office in the last two weeks.

¶6. (SBU) On April 16, suspected al-Shabaab militia killed Sharif Mohamed "Kariye" (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/Saleebaan) after an exchange of fire with his guards. To avenge the killing, former UIC militia now allied with the TFG reportedly attacked three al-Shabaab positions, killing three and wounding several others. Mukhtar Robow confirmed the attack on the al-Shabaab militia but denied that al-Shabaab is behind the killing. In his statement, Robow spoke out against Islamists fighting against one another, arguing that they were "all on the same team."

¶7. (SBU) On April 20, unknown assailants gunned down a female civilian officer working for the Minister of National Security at Mogadishu airport. The officer was killed on her way to work. Minister of Security Omar Hashi told us al-Shabaab is behind the killing.

¶8. (SBU) On April 21, unidentified gunmen killed Mohamed Mohamud Jimale "Agaweyne" (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/ Sa'ad) in a coffee shop at Talex junction in Mogadishu's Hodan district. Jimale joined Sharif in the Djibouti Process and served as a member of the Joint Security Committee. One of President Sharif's assistants told us Jimale was highly regarded within ARS circles and was a trusted ally of president Sharif. He served as Chairman of al-Furqan Courts and in 2006 was one of the senior commanders of UIC militia in the central region. In early January when Ethiopian forces were withdrawing from Mogadishu Jimale addressed a press conference expressing optimism and encouraged armed groups to work for peace. At the time of his death, Jimale was leading efforts to woo Habar Gedir militia from al-Shabaab to join the TFG.

Unsuccessful Assassination Attempts

¶9. (SBU) On March 26, TFG Minister of Interior Abdikadir Ali Omar (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/Saleebaan) survived a roadside bomb where his assistant was killed and one of his guards wounded. A former UIC leader, Ali has been instrumental in the TFG strategy to reach out and convince militia leaders and more fundamentalist Islamists to join the new administration. Ali is credited for bringing his close associate Yusuf Mohamed "Indha'Adde" to the side of the TFG.

¶10. (SBU) On April 1, unidentified gun men seriously wounded Member of Parliament Amir Shakete (minority clan/Rer Hamar) after opening fire on his vehicle. One person accompanying the lawmaker was killed the attack.

¶11. (SBU) On April 20, Ahmed Diriye (Hawiye/Habar Gedir/Saleebaan), spokesman for the Hawiye Traditional Unity Council (HTUC), survived an assassination attempt. Assailants followed Diriye's car from Bakara market and opening fire. His guards returned fire and the assailants eventually retreated. Diriye told us he is certain al-Shabaab was behind the attack. Diriye said he received information that 16 persons (11 from other regions and five from Mogadishu) were hired to identify him and were deployed in Bakara market with firm instructions to assassinate him and five other Mogadishu-based elders. Diriye accused al-Shabaab of targeting the elders to stop their peace efforts in Mogadishu. He said, "They publicly accuse us of being secretly appointed as TFG MPs and that we are paid for our support to the government." While Diriye and others have not stopped his outreach efforts he opined, "We have called them to peace but we do not expect al-Shabaab to stop violence, let alone accept the government."

Hawiye Elders Strike Back

¶12. (SBU) Following the assassination attempt on Diriye, HTUC called on Mogadishu residents to form neighborhood security patrols to combat al-Shabaab. At a press conference in Mogadishu, Mohamed

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Hassan Haad (Hawiye/Murasade), HTUC chairman urged residents to stand up against agents of violence and secure their neighborhoods. Haad condemned the recent surge in targeted killings and called on residents to maintain security. He said Islamic Sharia should be used while dealing with security violators. (Note: The practice of using Sharia law to combat violence was briefly employed in February-March 2007 in parts of Mogadishu and was initially effective. However, it quickly faced resistance from the TFG and anti-government groups. The TFG has not announced how it will react to these new measures). On April 6, PM Sharmarke urged Mogadishu residents to rise up against troublemakers. He said people should "not to hold their hands behind their backs" when innocent people are being killed.

¶13. (SBU) Immediately after Kariye was assassinated, Abdirahim Isse Adow (Hawiye/Abgal), former UIC spokesman now allied with TFG, blamed al-Shabaab for the killing. Adow public stated that al-Shabaab has assigned a hit squad to assassinate prominent people in the society who "it believes are opposed to its distorted and cruel ideology." He told the media that "al-Shabaab hatched a plan to eliminate anybody who they suspect or believe has knowledge of its violent tricks and tactics." Adow threatened dire consequences against al-Shabaab. Adow remains highly influential within the Hawiye clan and strongly supports Shirif and his administration.

Raising Public Sentiment
Against al-shabaab

¶14. (SBU) On April 22, Speaker of Parliament Adan Mohamed Nur "Madobe" fiercely condemned al-Shabaab at a press conference in Mogadishu. Speaker Madobe dismissed al-Shabaab as "a bunch of misguided Somali youths operating under foreigners' instructions." He lamented that al-Shabaab has brought to Somalia "foreigners of all colors, black and white" to cause sufferings to innocent Somalis. Madobe stated "by casting aspersions on parliament's

recent decision on Islamic Sharia law, al-Shabaab has clearly indicated that it is only serving foreign interests within Somalia." Madobe continued by stating that al-Shabaab's "perverted ideology" paints our religion in negative light to the outside world as a religion of violence against humanity. Madobe called al-Shabaab "a liability to Islam and Muslims."

Comment

¶15. (SBU) Madobe's castigation of al-Shabaab is the first public recrimination of the group by a senior TFG leader in Sharif's administration. His remarks were met with great support by Mogadishu residents terrorized by al-Shabaab's violent targeting of respected community leaders. While some MPs have told us they no longer leave their homes for fear of being killed, Madobe said that al-Shabaab will not stand in the way of parliament's work. While TFG security forces do not have the training or equipment to adequately protect its officials against attack, many still engage private militias who are filling this void. This most recent surge in killings has turned public sentiment strongly against al-Shabaab. At the same time, residents in the capital remain fearful that they might become the next victim. The district-based security efforts that Hawiye clan elders have initiated may have some successes, as they did in the past. Sustaining these community-based efforts will require support by the government and would be an opportunity for the international community to help these fledgling efforts against al-Shabaab.

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